

CODE OF ETHICS

The principles of a code of ethics are set out in broad statements to guide ethical decision-making for trustees who are entrusted with the expenditure of public funds. RCW 42.52 “Ethics in Public Service” establishes basic tenets of ethical public service for elected state officials, appointed officials, and other personnel in state government.

Like all policy statements, a code of ethics statement provides a framework for supporting procedures. Following are examples of codes adopted by state and national associations and commentary about a code adopted by Jefferson County Rural Library District Board of Trustees. Although all are similar, differences in approaches and some content are apparent.

AMERICAN LIBRARY ASSOCIATION

General Statement Guiding Librarians, Other Professionals, Library Trustees and Library Staffs

As members of the American Library Association, we recognize the importance of codifying and making known to the profession and to the general public the ethical principles that guide the work of librarians, other professionals providing information services, library trustees and library staffs.

Ethical dilemmas occur when values are in conflict. The American Library Association Code of Ethics states the values to which we are committed, and embodies the ethical responsibilities of the profession in this changing information environment.

We significantly influence or control the selection, organization, preservation, and dissemination of information. In a political system grounded in an informed citizenry, we are members of a profession explicitly committed to intellectual freedom and the freedom of access to information. We have a special obligation to ensure the free flow of information and ideas to present and future generations.

The principles of this Code are expressed in broad statements to guide ethical decision-making. These statements provide a framework; they cannot and do not dictate conduct to cover particular situations.

- We provide the highest level of service to all library users through appropriate and usefully organized resources; equitable service policies; equitable access; and accurate, unbiased, and courteous responses to all requests.
- We uphold the principles of intellectual freedom and resist all efforts to censor library resources.
- We protect each library user's right to privacy and confidentiality with respect to information sought or received and resources consulted, borrowed, acquired or transmitted.
- We recognize and respect intellectual property rights.
- We treat co-workers and other colleagues with respect, fairness and good faith, and advocate conditions of employment that safeguard the rights and welfare of all employees of our institutions.

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- We do not advance private interests at the expense of library users, colleagues, or our employing institutions.
 - We distinguish between our personal convictions and professional duties and do not allow our personal beliefs to interfere with fair representation of the aims of our institutions or the provision of access to their information resources.
 - We strive for excellence in the profession by maintaining and enhancing our own knowledge and skills, by encouraging the professional development of co-workers, and by fostering the aspirations of potential members of the profession.

AMERICAN LIBRARY ASSOCIATION, AMERICAN LIBRARY TRUSTEE ASSOCIATION, PUBLIC LIBRARY ASSOCIATION

This statement was developed by the Common Concerns Committee of the American Library Trustee Association (now the Association for Library Trustees and Advocates) and the Public Library Association. The boards of both associations adopted the statement.

Code of Ethics Statement

Trustees must promote a high level of library service while observing ethical standards.

Trustees must avoid situations in which personal interests might be served or financial benefits gained at the expense of library users, colleagues, or the institution.

It is incumbent upon any trustee to disqualify himself or herself immediately whenever the appearance of a conflict of interest exists.

Trustees must distinguish clearly in their actions and statements between their personal philosophies and attitudes and those of the institution, acknowledging the formal position of the board even if they personally disagree.

A trustee must respect the confidential nature of library business while being aware of and in compliance with applicable laws governing freedom of information.

Trustees must be prepared to support to the fullest the efforts of librarians in resisting censorship of library materials by groups or individuals.

Trustees who accept appointment to a library board are expected to perform all of the functions of library trustees.

WASHINGTON LIBRARY FRIENDS AND TRUSTEES ASSOCIATION

Code of Ethics

I will support and promote the public library system.

I will comply with all national, state and local laws, rules and regulations regarding public libraries, and follow only legal, professional and ethical procedures to bring about desired changes.

I will make decisions in terms of educational and informational needs of all citizens, and reach conclusions only after deliberation and full public debate with my fellow board members in a public meeting.

I will join with my fellow members on the board, the staff, and the community in the continuing study of the nature, value, and direction of public libraries in our society in order to facilitate needed changes and growth patterns.

I will work unremittingly to help the people of my community understand the importance of public education and the need to support it.

I will accept the responsibility to work with the library administrator and elected officials to ensure adequate funding for growing public libraries and to maintain optimum library standards.

I will recognize that my responsibilities are limited to policy-making decisions, planning, budgeting and evaluations.

I will participate in official board discussions and decisions, and recognize that authority rests with the whole board assembled in public meetings and will make no personal promises nor take any private action which may compromise the board.

I will not endorse censors, or represent the interests of individuals, organizations or political views which are in conflict with the role of the library to serve the entire public.

I will refer all complaints to the library administrator, and will act on such complaints at public meetings only after failure of an administrative solution.

CONNECTICUT LIBRARY BOARD MEMBERS CODE OF ETHICS

Board members have an obligation to do more than just meet legal, moral and ethical standards. As a member of this board, I will:

Represent the interests of all people served by this library and not favor special interests.

Do nothing to violate the trust of those who elected or appointed me to the board or of those we serve.

Not use my service on this board for my own personal advantage or of my friends.

Assure that all rules and policies directed to the library director are approved by a quorum of the board at a regular meeting. The chairman should abide by this rule.

Keep confidential information confidential.

Not publicly criticize policies adopted by the board.

Not hold board meetings without the library director.

Observe publicity and information policies of the board and library and refer requests to the director.

Not accept complaints from the public or staff on library matters. These complaints are the director's responsibility. Continued dissatisfaction and problems should be taken up at the board meeting ONLY if policy revision is necessary or legal ramifications are involved.

Attend meetings regularly, or otherwise resign so that an active member can be appointed.

JEFFERSON COUNTY RURAL LIBRARY DISTRICT CODE OF ETHICS

Commentary Contributed by: Sally Stiles
Member of the Jefferson County Board of Trustees

For many years, our library board had endorsed an updated, more specific but also somewhat restrictive version of a standardized Code of Ethics. However, when new members came onto the board, and it came time to review it, some board members realized that the old code included statements they could not conscientiously endorse. For instance, several board members felt that it was impossible to agree to a statement such as "I will uphold all national, state and local laws and regulations regarding public libraries" because we did not know what all the laws were.

In fact, according to a Washington county prosecuting attorney, "...if you require a priori that a trustee support a policy, you are effectively proscribing his/her duty to develop and adopt Board policy...each Board as a whole can adopt the Code of Ethics and the Library Bill of Rights and choose to follow them but you cannot require new members to adhere to previously enacted policy before they join. Each new board must establish its own policies."

When a new member comes onto your board, the group as a whole should review and readopt the Code of Ethics, so it's accepted by everyone on the board rather than imposed upon the new member.

We also wanted to ensure that, while the code was specific enough to apply to our board, no part of the code was so restrictive as to shut down open communication on important and changing issues. Should a new situation emerge, we would want to be able to discuss and support the pros and cons of it without feeling we were violating our Code of Ethics.

Following is the Code of Ethics as revised and accepted by The Board of Trustees of the Jefferson County Rural Library District:

I value the opportunity to serve our community as a trustee of the library, and support and promote our library and the benefits of the public library system.

I seek to comply with all national, state and local laws and regulations regarding public libraries, and seek to follow legal, professional and ethical procedures to bring about desired changes.

I give full consideration to the educational and informational needs of all members of the community, and reach decisions affecting the library after taking into account the views of my fellow board members in public meetings.

I embrace the First Amendment and the right for our patrons to pursue knowledge for their enrichment and continued education.

I believe in the freedom to speak, read, hear and view ideas and support unfettered access to all ideas. I recognize that libraries connect people to ideas and that library users are free to form, hold and express their own beliefs.

I join my fellow members of the board, staff and public in the continuing study of the nature, value and direction of our library and how it best serves our community in order to help facilitate needed changes and growth.

I accept the challenge to work with our library administration and elected officials to ensure adequate funding for our library so that we may best serve our community.

I understand the importance of participating in official board discussions and decisions, and recognize that the authority for decisions rests with the whole board assembled in public meetings. I understand that board members should not take individual actions which may compromise the board. Nor do I, when representing the board, promote the interests of special individuals, organizations or political views which may be in conflict with the role of the library to serve our entire public.

As a member of the Board of Trustees, I have invested the library administrator with the responsibility for handling all staff, patron and vendor problems and complaints. However, if the administration should fail to resolve those problems or complaints I will participate in acting on them at public meetings.

As a trustee, my responsibilities are for making decisions on policy and planning; for budgeting; evaluating the library director and the effectiveness of the library in serving our public.